

## SCIENCE

# Panels Seek Answers and Solutions for Global Tsunami-Warning Network

BY MARY CLARE JALONICK, CQ STAFF WRITER

Lawmakers from both chambers plan to investigate why nobody warned residents and vacationers along shorelines from Indonesia to eastern Africa before killer tsunamis swept ashore a day after Christmas.

The House Science Subcommittee on Environment, Technology and Standards and the Senate Commerce Subcommittee on Oceans, Fisheries and Coast Guard will hold hearings to examine the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) tsunami-warning systems, committee aides said Tuesday.

NOAA operates a sophisticated early warning system in the Pacific Ocean, but lacks the capacity to detect tsunamis with accuracy in the Indian Ocean, where they occur less frequently. The agency said it was unable to warn many of the countries hit by the waves Dec. 26.

"We want to try to understand what NOAA did and how or why they did it, and what we can do better in the future," said Eric Webster, staff director for the House Science subcommittee. "It's a safe bet that Congress will closely examine these programs to determine if there are needed budget increases or legislation."

Webster said his committee will invite NOAA staff to hold a "tsunami 101" briefing for House members before the committee holds its hearings.

Sen. Olympia J. Snowe, R-Maine, chairwoman of the Commerce subcommittee, wrote a letter to NOAA Administrator Conrad C. Lautenbacher Jr. on Dec. 29, saying NOAA's inability to warn Asian countries of the disaster "raises serious questions that I believe require a response and ultimately a solution so that we ensure information NOAA receives is quickly disseminated to all countries that could benefit from such critical information."

Although the Indian Ocean is outside the U.S. tsunami-warning network, lawmakers said the agency should have the capacity to detect major ocean disasters worldwide and contact nations that might be affected.

Sen. Joseph I. Lieberman, D-Conn., said this week that he will introduce a bill to expand the warning system. Congressional aides said they expect the Bush administration to add funds for



Large areas of Banda Aceh, a provincial capital in Indonesia, lie in ruin Monday after the tidal waves.

the Pacific Tsunami Warning System in the fiscal 2006 budget.

## What Went Wrong

In response to the congressional scrutiny, NOAA officials have said that they lack the advanced ocean buoys and water gauges in the Indian Ocean to collect data that is transmitted by satellite to NOAA.

Even if the equipment did exist, officials have said, many of the countries affected do not have warning systems that would have allowed them to alert citizens in time.

Lautenbacher has pledged to look into improving the warning system and said he may create an emergency team that could rapidly respond to disaster.

Chris Vaccaro, spokesman for NOAA's National Weather Service, said Tuesday that the U.S. probably would not build its

own warning system in the Indian Ocean, but could help other nations to do so.

"We would work with the international community to ensure that they know how to effectively maintain and operate a system of their own," he said.

Lawmakers also have expressed interest in assessing the need for an Atlantic Ocean warning system. There is no detection network in the Atlantic, which has fewer fault lines below its floor and is historically calmer than the Pacific and Indian oceans. But potential volcanos and landslides in the Caribbean and the Canary Islands off Africa could pose some threat of tsunamis.

"There's been so much attention to the disaster in Asia, one thing we need to do is clarify the extent of the threat for the Atlantic," Webster said. ♦

## HILL FACTS

### Serving With Past Opponents

The following senators serve with lawmakers who defeated them in a previous Senate election:

Senator	Defeated By	Election
Gordon H. Smith, R-Ore.	Ron Wyden, D-Ore.	1996 special election
Ben Nelson, D-Neb.	Chuck Hagel, R-Neb.	1996 general election
John Ensign, R-Nev.	Harry Reid, D-Nev.	1998 general election

Source: CQ Member Profiles